CHAPTER 11

Planning Concepts and Themes

New Trends in Master Planning

It is interesting to note that, within the past several decades, many cities and towns have been experimenting with a variety of techniques to plan for the future, from forecasting in the 1950s and '60s, strategic planning in the 1970s, and futures projects in the 1980s, to visioning in the 1990s (Ames, 1993). As these techniques have evolved, so has the level of public participation. Today, public involvement is an essential element of the planning process. Not only is public participation valuable from a planning perspective, but it also provides individuals with the opportunity to make a difference (Theobald, 1987).

Similarly, many communities across New Hampshire have been moving away from the preparation of the traditional, long-range comprehensive plan to a shorter, more strategic, visionary master plan. One of the primary reasons for this is that comprehensive plans contain tremendous amounts of data and, as a result, have become excessively long and expensive to prepare. Today's master plans are more sophisticated and polished community planning tools. They are shorter, less expensive to prepare and publish, often strategically focused, and more action-oriented in scope and content.

While there has been a resurgence of comprehensive planning here and there, for the most part the master planning being carried out in New Hampshire communities is more narrowly focused and short-range in scope. Generally the long-range plan (20 to 30 years) is being replaced by short-range and mid-range plans (5 to 10 or 10 to 20 years) that are more in tune with the community's capital improvement program, local growth management issues, and the need for immediate land development measures and solutions.

We live and work today in a dynamic and fast-paced society that demands and expects immediate or near-term results. As is true with business operations, local government and community planning must keep up with the times. As a result, today's master plans are getting smaller in size, content, and scope, focusing primarily on the core issues facing communities and the key visions and principles that can guide the overall growth and development of the community.

In addition, short and attractive master plan executive summaries are being developed for widespread public distribution and marketing applications **(click here to see the City of Nashua Master Plan Summary which can be found at the following web site: http://www.gonashua.com/**.) The use ofexecutive summaries helps to raise public awareness of a master plan. It also helps to keep key master plan principles and policies in the forefront as community decisions are made.

New planning terminology – such as smart growth, sustainability, and livable communities – is replacing many old master planning concepts, such as growth management, land capability, and quality of life. There is also a return to traditional urban design – the importance of design and place is being rediscovered, with particular emphasis on context-sensitive design and elimination of sprawl. Improved techniques in community organizing, study groups, and visioning are also being developed to achieve greater public participation in the planning process.

Advances in communications technology – Internet applications, powerful mapping, and geographic information systems, desktop graphics, and visualization software – are also being used to facilitate informed public decisions, enhance the design and the appearance of the plan, and market the plan to the public.

The publication of master plans is changing as well. More and more plans, community surveys, and maps are being placed on the Internet. This allows for substantial savings on printing and publication costs, including the distribution of executive summaries, and it gives communities greater exposure and accountability.

With all of these improvements, new planning models are being developed, including strategic master plans (see the Town of Bedford's strategic plan) and citizen-based focus groups and study circle planning efforts (see the Concord 2020 and the Portsmouth Master Plan 2003).

What can we expect in the future? It is likely that we will see more communities updating their master plans – not all at once, but one chapter at a time. With the most recent revisions to New Hampshire's master planning laws, it is possible that many communities will want to prepare the abridged plan. This is a shortened version of the traditional master plan; it includes only the two mandatory chapters required by the state statutes, a vision section and a land use section.

It is also quite likely that more communities will be conducting internal audits and policy evaluations of their existing plans and regulations through the use of such pre-designed scorecards as the smart growth audit **(click here to launch audit)**. We may see also more communities prepare functional single-topic plans for such issues as open space, natural hazards, historic preservation, and water resources protection. This change has been an ongoing process in response to local needs as well as new state and federal regulations. However, the fundamental purpose and function of the master plan at the community level cannot be altered or avoided; communities will always need to look ahead through visioning and provide opportunities for public involvement.

As New Hampshire's cities and towns continue to grow, we are likely to see more active citizen-based groups and community associations forming at a much larger community-wide scale. In time, those organizations may seek to develop the master plan through citizen-initiated planning efforts, working with city or town hall in a bottom-up, rather than a top-down, planning process.

In short, most of the planning trends we are seeing will have the overall effect of enhancing awareness and promoting acceptance of the master plan. Wider community support and public participation in the process will only lead to new and better planning models in the future.

Growth Management

Growth management is a planning approach that addresses the problems of rapid development. It is as much a philosophy as it is a collection of tools and techniques. Growth management is an approach that recognizes growth is inevitable, whether a community desires it or not. While it uses many traditional planning tools, such as the comprehensive plan, it uses them in new ways to guide how and where the community's share of expected growth is to occur. This helps to ensure that growth takes place in a way that is acceptable and beneficial to the community, while reducing its negative effects. Some common growth management tools include the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR), the Growth Management Ordinance (RSA 674:22), Timing of Development and Growth Management, and Interim Regulations (RSA 674:23).

Smart Growth

The toolkit offered by the Georgia Quality Growth Partnership (2002) describes smart growth as building "neighborhoods and communities that widen opportunities for pleasant, hospitable, and economically beneficial conditions for living, working, and recreating." The Urban Land Institute also provides a simple definition of smart growth: "an evolving approach to development, the goal of which is to balance economic progress with environmental protection and quality of life." The American Planning Association's 2002 policy guide on smart growth (the entire text of which can be downloaded at: http://www.planning.org/newsreleases/2002/ftp0502.htm) defines it as follows:

Smart Growth means comprehensive planning to guide, design, develop, revitalize, and build communities that

- have a unique sense of community and place
- preserve and enhance valuable natural and cultural resources
- expand the range of transportation, employment, and housing choices in a fiscally responsible manner
- value long-range, regional considerations of sustainability over short-term, incremental, geographically isolated actions
- promote public health and healthy communities

Compact, transit-accessible, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development patterns, and land reuse epitomize the principles of Smart Growth.

In contrast to prevalent development practices, smart growth refocuses a larger share of regional growth within central cities, urbanized areas, inner suburbs, and areas that are already served by infrastructure. Smart growth reduces the share of growth that occurs on newly urbanizing land, existing farmlands, and in environmentally sensitive areas. In areas with intense growth pressure, development in newly urbanizing areas should be planned and developed according to smart growth principles.

There is broad consensus on the breadth and scope of smart growth, but there is less agreement on its basic principles. The New Hampshire Office of State Planning prepared a CD-ROM in April 2003 titled *Achieving Smart Growth in New Hampshire*. This CD-ROM identifies and describes the following eight major principles:

Principle 1:	Maintain traditional compact settlement patterns
Principle 2:	Foster the traditional character of downtowns, villages, and neighborhoods
Principle 3:	Incorporate a mix of uses
Principle 4:	Provide choices and safety in transportation
Principle 5:	Preserve New Hampshire's working landscape
Principle 6:	Protect environmental quality
Principle 7:	Involve the community in planning and implementation
Principle 8:	Manage growth locally, but work with neighboring towns

Discussed on this CD-ROM are three pilot communities within New Hampshire (Chester, Derry, and Pembroke) that participated in community self-study to determine if a disconnect between their vision and their regulations was contributing to sprawl.

Smart Growth Audit

To help assist your community in developing smart growth practices, a smart growth audit is included on this CD-ROM **(click here to launch audit).** A smart growth audit is similar to a financial audit, although the subject matter investigated and the principles applied are different. This audit provides you with an opportunity to evaluate your community's land use policies and regulations for the application of smart growth principles. It further provides an opportunity to compare smart growth and conventional development outcomes as a result of your community's plans and policies. This is important if you plan to include a smart growth chapter in your master plan.

Compact Growth

Compact growth is one of the principles of smart growth. The concept has been adapted from the principles of urban form and design. Basically, the objective is to limit the overall area for development in your community by creating a compact urban form. This objective is implemented through the use of urban growth boundaries. Compact growth also encourages the clustering of specific uses and densities of development where urban services are available or can be readily available.

Urban Growth Boundaries

Urban growth boundaries are basically zoning or master planning borders that lie at the edges of urbanized areas. The boundaries are designed to protect significant natural areas and provide separation between existing towns and cities and between urban and rural settings. Lands within the urban growth boundary should be accessible to transit, contiguous to existing development, planned, and zoned for urban uses. Complementary strategies include

- promoting intergovernmental coordination on comprehensive planning
- requiring a regional review of local plans
- encouraging interjurisdictional review of developments with regional impact

Integrated Planning

Integrated planning is a fairly recent concept that promotes the notion that land use, transportation, and air quality are highly dependent upon each other and thus require integrated planning. As expressed in a guidebook for integrating land use, transportation, and air quality planning, called Managing Colorado's Future (March, 1997), there are ten fundamental principles.

1. Have a vision.
2. Engage citizens early.
3. Think regionally, act locally.
4. Plan for the long haul.
5. Know where you are at all times.
6. Think carrot-and-stick.
7. Be consistent, complementary, and contradiction-free.
8. Ensure flexibility.
9. Commit to development that can be sustained over time.
10. Keep it simple.

Neotraditional Development

Neotraditional development is an emerging planning and design practice that has its roots in the New Urbanism Movement. It consists of a number of essential principles. These principles are briefly identified below.

1. Encourage a mix of land uses to make walking for some errands more attractive and feasible.
2. Reduce lot sizes. Traditional neighborhoods typically have lots that are a third to a quarter of the size of conventional suburban neighborhoods.
3. Reduce building distance from the street. Minimize distances between building entrances and transit stops.
4. Discourage abundant free parking. Research has shown that typical parking requirements of four spaces per 1,000 square feet of floor area are excessive and contribute to inefficient use of land.
5. Provide generous landscaping, paved sidewalks, and safe street crossings. Build streets that serve pedestrians at least as much as they serve motor vehicles.
6. Build streets that are narrower than conventional subdivision streets; require sidewalks, trees, and other pedestrian amenities.
7. Build neighborhoods within walking distance (approximately _ mile) of activity centers, shopping, and the like.

8. Plan a "density gradient," in which higher densities are required near activity centers and transit stops (if available), with densities becoming lower as one moves away from those centers. Encouraging clustering of buildings in centers, shared parking facilities, and pedestrian/bike pathways connecting centers.
9. Prohibit the creation of cul-de-sacs unless pedestrian and bike access across the ends is provided. Encourage a grid or modified grid street layout that provide alternative routes to destinations.
10. Provide connections to neighboring developments to avoid "islands" of development that depend on collector streets for all travel between them.

Traditional Neighborhood Development

A traditional neighborhood development (TND) is a physical example of the implementation of neo-traditional development principles.